



Kate Edmundson
Interim Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COMMISSIONERS:
CAROL O. BIONDI
PATRICIA CURRY
HON. JOYCE FAHEY
ANN E. FRANZEN
SUSAN F. FRIEDMAN
HELEN A. KLEINBERG, CHAIR
DAISY MA
DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY
REV. CECIL L. MURRAY
WENDY L. RAMALLO, ESQ.
SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **October 16, 2006**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (No Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Wendy L. Ramallo
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry
Hon. Joyce Fahey
Ann E. Franzen
Susan F. Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg
Daisy Ma
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Sandra Rudnick

YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

William Johnson

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Because of a lack of quorum, approval of the minutes of the October 2, 2006, general meeting was deferred.

CHAIR'S REPORT

In the absence of Chair Kleinberg, Vice Chair Sorkin brought the meeting to order.

- The election of Commission officers will take place on November 6.
- A draft of the Commission's annual report has been forwarded to all members, who are asked to provide any final comments to the office immediately.
- Vice Chair Sorkin welcomed Austin Patteson to the staff of the Commission. Julio Portillo has accepted a full-time position in the Executive Office.
- This year's Commission retreat is scheduled on October 30 from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at The California Endowment facility near Union Station.
- Commissioners were asked to give Elizabeth Hinton their certificates of completion from their mandatory ethics training sessions.
- Vice Chair Sorkin expressed appreciation to Armand Montiel, who last week helped a young woman she knew who had aged out of DCFS, entered the probation system, and is now homeless with a three-week-old baby. Vice Chair Sorkin also referred another young woman—in foster care from age 14, and now at age 23 a mother of four children, three of whom are in foster care themselves—to the alumni center, where Casey Family Services will work with her on various goals.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Trish Ploehn introduced her new chief deputy, Susan Kerr, former chief deputy of the Department of Mental Health. Ms. Kerr briefly outlined her long history in the human services arena, starting as a social worker with the Department of Public Social Services and serving as a budget analyst and then a division chief with the Chief Administrator's Office, overseeing the Department of Children and Family Services, DPSS, DMH, Community and Senior Services, and Military and Veterans Affairs. Though Ms. Kerr expects a learning curve with specific DCFS issues, she is familiar with the department and is looking forward to her new position.
- Staff has been allocated to support the service planning areas in their work around homeless issues, and **Priscilla Cruz** has been appointed DCFS's homeless case manager, beginning full-time on November 13. Commissioner Biondi asked whether separate allocations had been made for DCFS and Probation, and whether any focus was being put on transition-aged youth. Ms. Ploehn said that the homeless project included:
 - A specialty CSW (children's social worker) homeless expert for each of the DCFS regional offices
 - A CSA I assigned to each SPA to function as a contract manager/systems navigator for homeless families within that catchment area, to assess their safety and risk factors, open a DCFS case if so indicated, and connect them to needed resources

Runaway youth who are homeless are not specifically included in the project—falling instead under the Runaway Youth Task Force headed by Anita Shannon—but may be

in future, as runaway youth are assigned a Permanency Partners Program (P3) worker to help locate them. As Ms. Ploehn said, most runaway youth are not found on skid row, but sometimes, sadly, they aren't found at all. Commissioner Biondi noted that the task force does not include runaway Probation youth, estimated at another 5,000 to 6,000 individuals.

The Service Integration Branch and Supervisor Burke's office are asking departmental directors to design a seamless system, and a meeting will be held in a couple of weeks to look at how the Title IV-E waiver funds might be used in this area.

STATUS OF TITLE IV-E WAIVER

- The state has still not made the fiscal decisions that will trigger a finalization of the waiver plan. On Friday, Mitch Mason will participate in a conference call with the State Department of Social Services, Alameda County, the state Assembly speaker's office, and Assembly budget staff, at which good news is expected. If a state decision does not materialize, the Commission's help with advocacy may be necessary.
- The Probation Department has made dramatic progress in its waiver planning, and the Board of Supervisors recently asked the Chief Administrative Officer to ensure that the county develops a fiscally and programmatically sound local plan for the sharing and maximizing of the capped IV-E waiver allocation. At last week's DCFS executive team, Jitahadi Imara reviewed Probation's current service array and family-focused strategies for what it hopes to build in the community. Commissioner Biondi cautioned that—although many people in that department truly care about children and youth, and Mr. Imara is one of them—Probation's talk often centers around the way its continuum of care *should* be, not the way it *is* (virtually nonexistent). She urged Mr. Mason to ask an extra two or three questions when it seems appropriate.
- Lisa Parrish and Mr. Mason met with representatives of the Association of Community Human Services Agencies last Tuesday to hear points ACHSA believes are critical to the waiver plan. Those recommendations will be brought to the executive team.
 - Multidisciplinary assessment teams must be included and brought to scale.
 - Funding must be attached to performance measure outcomes so that providers do not end up doing more work for the same money.
 - A nonprofit family-finding component should be added to replicate the work being done at Five Acres.
 - The aftercare model must be expanded to include services beyond family preservation, into group homes and foster family agencies as well.
 - The parent-care advocate model should be replicated within congregate care and community-based facilities.
 - Public/private oversight must be ensured for the waiver implementation process.

Vice Chair Sorkin asked about the parent councils—what steps are being taken to serve Spanish-speaking families, since about half of DCFS's population are Latino and about 30 percent speak only Spanish? Mr. Mason clarified that the plan to be submitted to the

state is a high-level document, not an operational plan, and extensive work will be needed after the state accepts the county's plan. Cultural competence is indeed the plan's intent.

Commissioner Biondi suggested including a member of the Children's Planning Council on the executive team reviewing the waiver plan, contending that the Council's involvement could be enormously beneficial to the process, particularly as it has taken on the juvenile justice system as a focus and included a presentation from Probation at its last meeting. Commissioner Williams agreed that input to DCFS makes sense, but objected to the Council's being singled out. Commissioner Biondi's point was to help the Probation Department connect with and be aware of the Council as a resource, and Commissioner Williams suggested that the Children's Planning Council work directly with Probation.

Commissioner Murray asked how the waiver plan addresses emancipation, which Mr. Mason explained was not a focus because funding for emancipation is through Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, and those services are not waived. Of course, through better prevention work up front, plus expedited reunification and shorter times to permanency, future emancipating populations should decrease.

DCFS EDUCATION

- As Commissioners remember from previous presentations, the state considers fields in the CWS/CMS computer database related to education—school location, grade level, attendance, achievement, etc.—‘not mandatory,’ and social workers are not required to complete them, making the collection of reliable data on the educational attainment of foster youth extremely difficult. However, DCFS's education unit is working with the Education Coordinating Council to complete annual data matches with the Los Angeles Unified School District. Two such reports are available, comparing LAUSD's enrollment in winter 2005 and winter 2006 with DCFS and Probation caseloads from around those times, yielding a total of between 8,000 and 9,000 system youth enrolled in LAUSD. A small interdepartmental group—including Lisa Parrish from DCFS, Sharon Hurada from Probation, Sam Chan from the Department of Mental Health, and ECC staff—meets regularly to discuss data issues in depth.

Commissioner Biondi asked about nonpublic schools and about similar data matches with the Los Angeles County Office of Education. Nonpublic school data is included in the reports, Ms. Parrish said, but although the ECC is committed to matching LACOE information, that body has historically been reluctant to share data. On July 15, Judge Michael Nash of the Juvenile Court issued a blanket order authorizing the release of educational records to all those involved in a foster or probation youth's case plan; however, attorneys from both LAUSD and LACOE continue to regard that blanket order as illegal. A compromise agreed to by Judge Nash, whereby specific language will appear in every minute order that authorizes the release of records within two weeks, will be announced at the ECC meeting later this month. This will require a new form for caseworkers to complete, and Ms. Parrish sees the process as a “long row to hoe” to make happen. The ECC has pledged a continued concentration on confidentiality and information issues, a long-time barrier to effective services.

- From a recent allocation of state augmentation funds, chiefly to reduce workloads and caseloads, DCFS has reserved \$500,000 to establish five new academic mentoring centers, targeting five middle schools that feed the high schools with the largest numbers of system youth. Vice Chair Sorkin relayed concerns expressed by many youth over being identified as foster children, preferring to be as ‘normal’ as possible. As the department designs the RFP, it is grappling with that issue, looking at models that open their doors to all youth, to youth known to the system (not just those in out-of-home care), or to at-risk youth—or at models that leave the target population undefined. Under any circumstances, it will be a priority for caseworkers to work with caregivers to refer youth to mentoring services. Fewer than 1,800 DCFS youth currently reside in group homes—an additional 1,300 Probation youth do, besides a further 500 who are AWOL from those Probation placements—but another 15,000 DCFS children are of school age: the initiative’s scope is clearly broader than group home residents alone. Depending on whether a mentoring or more open tutoring model is used within a large population, Commissioner Williams commented, identifying any given child as a foster youth may not be necessary.

Commissioner Ramallo expressed concern that the dollars involved were so few, and encourage DCFS to work with other departments to perhaps issue a joint RFP with combined resources to support mentoring rather than just academic tutoring, since foster youth in particular need deeper relationships. The full allocation, Ms. Parrish explained, is \$2.5 million—better, although admittedly not enough. The other \$2 million has been reserved for relationship-based mentoring programs, using eight SPA-based contracts with agencies that would provide services to youth when they return home after out-of-home placements or when they get off probation.

- Vice Chair Sorkin relayed several questions from Chair Kleinberg:
 - Is any data collected on the number of children birth to age five enrolled in pre-school or early childhood education programs? Ms. Parrish said no.
 - How many team decision-making conferences involve talking about child development or where the child is educationally? Ms. Parrish said that, in theory, all do; the facilitator training includes that topic.
 - With Ms. Parrish in charge of both mentoring and education within the department, is there any diminution of time or energy around either of those two important issues? Ms. Parrish said that she hoped the opposite; her position of assistant division chief of education and mentoring connects the two concepts and upgrades the importance of mentoring, especially since it has not historically been seen as a core child welfare service. She also stressed the importance of the ECC as a vehicle for helping the department as a whole focus on its goals and accountability with regard to education.
 - How many education liaisons are planned, and where? **Patty Armani** said that 141 expressions of interest have already been received as a result of the RFP recently

released, with a submission deadline of this Wednesday. One full-time-equivalent position is planned for each of the 19 regional offices, with El Monte getting a half-time person. Applicants must be credentialed teachers with three years of experience within the last five; extra points are given if they are PSA counselors or have a background in special education.

- Gail McFarlane-Sosa presented information on high school graduation rates for DCFS students, reminding Commissioners that this year was the first that all students in the state were required to pass both the English-language arts and mathematics portions of the California high school exit examination (CAHSEE) before receiving a diploma. School districts want students to pass the exit exam, and often provide special prep classes. Students take the exit exam starting in the tenth grade, and have six chances to pass.

A hand count by DCFS regional offices—only a couple did not submit the information, and Ms. Parrish promised a fact sheet with final data—showed that last year, 83 percent of eligible DCFS students graduated, a figure that fell to 79 percent this year.

This was calculated by taking DCFS's 1,000 twelfth-graders and deducting those who continued to take classes, moved, had their cases closed, or died (as two students did). This left a total of 736 students, of whom 578 graduated, passing both portions of the CAHSEE. Of the original thousand, 75 youth (10 percent) passed the GED, 63 were noted as dropouts, and 170 continued taking classes; 202 (20 percent) failed to pass the exit exam, and 57 did not have enough credits to graduate, with some continuing in summer school or working on their GEDs.

When asked about commonalities among students who lacked credits or failed the exit exam, Ms. McFarlane-Sosa said that, as valuable as that information might be, case files would have to be individually researched to discover shared characteristics in placement or background. On the other end, however, the ECC is looking at similarities among the 163 gifted and talented system youth identified through its data matches, hoping to find traits in common that might be replicable.

Of this year's graduates, 110 have enrolled in higher education (mostly community colleges), 24 are going into vocational training, and 6 have entered the military. Ms. Parrish indicated that these figures were probably an undercount, and that the emancipation unit is trying to work with the independent living database to create a foster care alumni database for those in college. She has asked the state, which administers Chafee education and training vouchers, for the names of students receiving those, but the state has insisted that it cannot share that data. Commissioner Biondi suggested asking the Children's Law Center to get that information from its lawyers if they have it. The United Friends of the Children also maintains a database of graduates, Commissioner Williams said. Connectedness in the college years is important, and Ms. Parrish is sending a delegation of youth (led by emancipation ombudsman Berisha Black) to the It's My Life conference in Seattle, sponsored by Casey Family

Programs. She agreed that the department needs to work more closely with nonprofit organizations in making links.

- According to recent Federal law, foster children age birth to 36 months must be referred to Regional Centers for assessment. This age group represents 6,262 (or 16 percent) of the department's caseload as of May—no small number. Unfortunately, the law mandates the referral only, not the assessment itself. The early identification and intervention committee is working with Regional Centers to develop a collaboration, and Regional Centers are also part of Judge Nash's interagency meetings. DCFS is revising its forms to help Regional Centers understand some of the issues that dependency children often have, and a USC student getting her doctorate in occupational therapy is creating a training tool to use with caregivers to provide better information regarding younger children. Although assessments are performed at Regional Center offices (or contracted out by them), services are provided in-home, and advance efforts must also be made with school districts to make sure the child is ready for school when the time comes.
- Another Federal law requires that foster children be given top priority to enroll in Head Start and Early Head Start at no cost, and for the last two years DCFS has sent a flyer to parents informing them of this resource (and of the Los Angeles Universal Preschool initiative), encouraging them to enroll their children, and making clear what schools expect children to know when they enter kindergarten.

RESIDENTIALLY BASED SERVICES WORK GROUP

The work group has been active since April 2005, Lisa Parrish said, and spent the summer thinking about reforms in the group-home environment that might come about in a more flexible environment under the Title IV-E waiver. The department's overall four goals are to:

- Decrease timelines to permanency, focusing on reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship
- Decrease re-entry into placement
- Decrease the number of children in long-term foster care, and the time they spend there
- Decrease the number of children and youth in group care

The number of DCFS children in group homes is now a small portion, and a shrinking one, of all those in out-of-home care. About three years ago, close to 600 children age 12 and younger were placed in group homes, a figure now down to about 250. The emphasis for younger children is to be in family-based settings, and providers are aware that one of DCFS's goals is to keep young children out of congregate care.

Although the Title IV-E waiver plan understandably focuses on services at the front end—the more children who can be prevented from entering out-of-home care, the better—the work group does feel that recommendations for new services that could be

paid for through savings resulting from a reduction in the use of group home beds should continue to be considered as the waiver plan evolves.

1. Expand wraparound services to youth who don't currently qualify for such services (those placed in lower RCL placements), expand the number of wraparound slots in general to 1,200 from the 800 slots currently budgeted, and increase the breadth of services available in wraparound programs, especially services for parents and family members.
2. Call upon group homes to provide the kind of residential wraparound services recently piloted within Los Angeles County, from the point of each child's entry into the group home.
3. Build in the requirement and provide the necessary resources for group homes to assist with family-finding and family support services, beginning at the point of each child's entry into the group home.
4. Enable peer support programs at group homes, including parent partners and youth advocates.
5. Provide the resources to group homes to hire mentoring program coordinators at a ratio of one program coordinator for every 25 youth at the facility.
6. Over time, use the savings from the reduction in group home beds to fund family-finding, family support, mentoring, and aftercare (including flexible funding, respite, parent support, residential wraparound, etc.) at residentially based service providers.
7. Expand the use of family preservation services to reduce placement time and the chance of re-entry into either the DCFS or Probation systems—a suggestion the Probation Department is particularly interested in.
8. Develop therapeutic foster care programs, including the very high-end multidimensional treatment foster care model that includes specialized foster parents who are trained and supported to function as the primary treatment setting, a limit of one or two children placed in the home, a team approach to treatment planning, case management caseloads not to exceed eight, 24-hour crisis intervention access, weekly contacts with the home, and a focus on permanency.
9. Develop alternative program design and funding models for residentially based services programs, focused on short-term treatment interventions, family support, and permanency, as envisioned in SB 380, legislation that did not pass this year.

Commissioner Biondi asked if enough resources existed for this final suggestion to be started on a small scale. Ms. Parrish said that agency interest could be solicited, but success would always come down to money, especially since children must leave a residential setting within six to nine months. Perhaps a little bit of money from a lot of programs would work, Commissioner Biondi said, as an evidence-based practice like this could be

enormously valuable if taken to a grander scale. Ms. Parrish agreed, saying, however, that the county doesn't necessarily want to take the state off the hook for acknowledging the failure of its ratings system and the need for a systemwide re-engineering. The current rating and payment system does not encourage permanency and provides no incentives for getting children out of group home beds; a revamped payment system ideally would provide incentives for permanency.

Ms. Parrish acknowledged the valuable participation of representatives from the California Youth Connection in the work group's efforts, and promised to get Commissioners copies of feedback from the series of 'speak outs' held for youth in group homes to address their quality-of-life issues. The work group has pledged that, while it thinks about the long-term future of the system, it also needs to consider the real problems that youth are experiencing right now, addressing their complaints about personal rights, medication utilization and abuse, and education, to name but a few.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED